OUR FAITH

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A Christmas Rosary

My creedal rosary has broken, spilling its unfingered beads at my prayer-bent knees.

But in the sanctuary of the Christmas spirit I have found another rosary strung on the silken thread of love.

So I count each bead as I reverently pray:

Teach me that Love was in travail when infant stars were born and virgin suns groaned with maternity.

Unstop my ears that I may hear the love story of wooing atoms, plighting their troth for ever and aye.

Show me that Love hath made big stars my brothers, little flowers my sisters, and vesper-souled birds companions for my soul.

Let me feel a divine enchantment in the celestial sympathy of human suffering, with hopes for notes, dreams for bars, unselfish lives as instruments.

Cause me to know that Love and Truth are always born in lowly places, in simple lives, humble minds, and contrite hearts.

Grant me when my little day is done the lingering joy of having lived as an oft-repeated echo of the Christmas story —the Romance of Eternal Love.

Advent

"And thou, child, shalt be called the Son of the Highest, Counselor, Prince of Peace." What a frail thing is a baby! How easily this bundle of potentialities is blighted! A moment of neglect, a cold draught, unwholesome food, and the tender promise of great things has slipped away.

So love comes into our lives, not through logic, nor by reason heralded with trumpets, but as a frail babe, the wistful promptings of great things to be. Love must ever grow in lowly beings—the infinite fusing with the finite, a blending of joy and sorrow, a bursting seed-pod wafted from eternal ways down the streets of time.

Lowly kneeling at the foot of a manger, we invite you this day, not to a crusade, but to a sweet ministry of nursing the heart-hunger of all men in every clime and race, that love may grow into manhood, and by its gentle sway guide the destinies of groping humanity.

W. WALDEMAR W. ARGOW
(Minister, First Unitarian Church, Baltimore, Md.)

Christmas Belongs To Us All

Nothing could more witness to the universality of the Christian Gospel than Christmas. Christmas knows no wall or partition between Protestant and Catholic, between Fundamentalist and Modernist. Young and old, rich and poor, Greek, Russian, German, Chinese, American—all enter into the spirit of Christmas. All kneel before the crib on the day of the nativity. Catholic carols such as "Silent Night" and "O Come, All Ye Faithful" will be sung in every Protestant church in the world. And it is not at all uncommon to hear the beautiful "O Little Town of Bethlehem," the work of the liberal Episcopalian, Phillips Brooks, sung in Catholic churches before the midnight mass. What devout fundamentalist ever asks who wrote "It Came Upon the Midnight Clear" or would give up singing it if he knew it was the work of Edmund Sears, a Unitarian clergyman? I have seen tears in the eyes of the most vocal of Unitarians as he stood for the

Alleluiah Chorus, when in mighty thunder rolled out the words—"King of Kings, and Lord of Lords! For He shall reign forever and ever, Alleluiah!"

Yes, Christmas is above the higher criticism, above and beyond theology. On that day it is not theology, but God, who enters into our world, with a promise of peace on earth to men of good will, a peace to be enjoyed in the midst of war and tumults, a peace which this world can neither give nor take away.

On one day of the year we are all the children of One Father—a promise of a far off divine event when our common sonship shall have no end in our common brotherhood with Christ.

JOHN CLARENCE PETRIE
(Minister, First Unitarian Church, Houston, Texas)

The Meaning of Christmas

Something came into the world on the first Christmas that changed the whole trend and temper of human living. Each subsequent Christmas has meaning to the extent that it re-affirms and re-emphasizes that something. The world was a puzzle at that time, and life was a baffling mystery. The best thinking of the time could make nothing of it. The Epicureans were frankly escapists in their recommendation. There is a silver lining to every cloud, they said; and even the cloud becomes endurable with familiarity. There is nothing good or bad but thinking maketh it so. Learn to think it is "somehow good;" dwell chiefly on the silver lining; make the most of daily pleasures; be friendly and helpful and optimistic. So learn to stick it out till merciful death releases you.

The Stoics took a somewhat nobler stand: Life is a play whose meaning and development are no business of ours. Leave all that to the Great Director, and meanwhile act as well as you can the role in the play, whatever it may be, which the Director has assigned to you. Your personal integrity and honor and self-respect are in your own control. Guard these with jealous care, and leave the outcome of the play as a whole to the Director.

The Academy had little but theory to offer: Life could be fair and just and beautiful, but it needs proper government—the Philosopher King. The material is all here awaiting the Master Craftsman. But he is lacking. So long as the selfish and the superficial and the immediate outweigh the true and the universal and the lasting in human hearts, we are helpless. What can we do about it?

The world was stuck on a dead center, aimless, bewildered, hungry for a word of confident guidance. That word came from the unlikeliest of sources, and Christmas Day stands for his birth. He was a spirit so radiant in his faith that he never thought of himself as a brave man. A little child could understand. In fact, the chief reason why grown men could not see the answer was that they were so un-childlike, all bound up in the web of their own fatuous sophistications. The world is God's vineyard, created by him to bear the good fruit of happiness and abundance of life. Men and women are his children, objects of his love and pride, from whom he expects willing participation in his enterprise. His invitation is spoken to all: "Son, go work today in my vineyard."

On that first Christmas certain tremendous novelties came into the world. The fear of God was replaced by the love of God. Life was given a meaning and a purpose. Man was raised to a new dignity. If he would, he could become the beloved son of God. Righteousness was supplied with a higher motive—not to avoid God's wrath, but to earn his proud approval. And the service of God ceased to be a grim compulsion and became a happy privilege.

Christmas therefore means the birth of one who taught us a religion of personal nearness to God, of purpose and hope, of dignity and self-respect, of spontaneous righteousness, and of happiness. We call it Christianity because it was the religion which Christ himself practiced. As the centuries have passed we have grown used to it, and so perhaps have lost something of its original radiance. But its hold on us lies not in its novelty, but in its ability to furnish precisely the spiritual qualities which the better part of our nature always craves. Those qualities are re-discovered at each recurrent Christmas season. To love Christmas is to be initiated afresh into the love and purpose and hope and joy of Christ.

CHARLES E. PARK
(Minister Emeritus, First Church in Boston, Mass.)

"The Lord Christ's Heart"

Channing put it thus: "Christ is Christianity. The more I know of Jesus, the less I can spare him from my life." I am convinced Channing was sound in his judgment.

The life of Jesus, being a personal fact in history, appeals to us for reasons neither scientific nor rational nor philosophic nor imaginative. Emerson did well to set the value of Jesus quite apart from these, when he says: "I am the owner of the sphere, of the seven stars, and the solar year, of Caesar's hand, and Plato's brain, of Lord Christ's heart, and Shakespeare's strain." The Christian gospel is both higher and lower than all else, at once more primitive and more divine. You can have science and know the repetitive patterns the stars trace in the blue of night. You may be engaged in mightly deeds, as was Caesar, or write books of epochal significance, as did Plato, or frame such immortal poems as Shakespeare, yet none of these is the slightest guarantee of the kind of moral being who possesses the Lord Christ's heart. Without it, all else is dust and ashes, is but the bright coloring upon a dubious plant. I know nothing more dreadful, more terrible, than immense intellectual or practical ability united to a evil will. That is, in short, a definition of Satan.

Because the Bethlehem babe was and taught the centrality of the heart, of the moral being, of adoration to God, of fellowship one with another — because of these, no man has dared to set himself above Jesus and proclaim his own newness. Thomas a Kempis sought only a perfect imitation of Christ, the martyrs sought martyrdom, the friars went barefoot, missioners penetrate to every corner of the globe, Christian charities are founded and Christian acts performed—all in imitation of Christ, who knocks at our door and room must be found for him.

A man who traveled through Europe at the close of the war found the church people still battered, shocked by the extent and fierceness of the crisis through which they had just passed. For their strength they repeated a sentence from the New Testament, a sentence which poured energy into their veins, filled them with renewed hope. It is a simple Christian sentence, which confirms and secures everything precious in the Christmas story and every other story of Christ. In the still-cold, still-shattered, still-roofless and windowless European churches the people nodded solemnly to each other and repeated the words of Jesus: "Lo, I am with you, even unto the end of the world."

ALEXANDER P. WINSTON
(Minister, First Parish, Portland, Maine)

What Christ Means to a Unitarian Laywoman

Religion and church and parish life have meant a great deal to me always, and I see it all out in the sunlight before God. It is natural to me to say "out in the sunlight" because I know the fair daily sunshine well, and all my life my religious moods have been bright and warm. This I ascribe entirely to one fact, namely, my early acquaintance with the transforming influence of Jesus and the historic Christ. It was the nature and teachings of Jesus that taught the childish mind the beauty of holiness, and keyed beauty and goodness into one chord. It was Jesus who beyond all other miraculous characters in childhood's library, stood out as possessor of the insight to penetrate disguise, to rescue, to transfigure. Jason and Cinderella and St. George left their pages and entered the play of imaginative childhood, while Jesus became a dear friend, more wonderful than the others—beloved. Love opens a child's heart, and trust is born, and these call to the imagination.

No wonder that the intrinsic truth and beauty of the story of the Nativity in lowliness was a favorite over the myth of the good St. Nicholas, whose benevolence was once annually. It was good will, and not benevolence, that took first place in the young mind, with the beginnings of spiritual insight which, with the years, learned to reverence the selfless passion of Jesus to atone for the shabby robe, the limping personality, the human incompleteness. A Christian disciple was in the making, and came to maturity when with Christian clarity it saw in human incompleteness a divine invitation to give heart and hand to God's

work of perfection. Christ, the master humanist, had revealed his missionary nature and gospel, and the religious principle of purposeful good will.

Now, if this is a fair picture of the early shaping of a Christian, what follows? I did not say "making" of a Christian—but "shaping" of a Christian—which depicts something unfinished, in process. What comes next? To begin with, if a man's intellect has moved along with his emotional experience, his mind will tell him that his life is only partly Christian, which is also the state of his fellows, and that consequently Christianity lies nowhere in the world but ahead. If at this point he possesses both zeal and sincerity he will set himself upon the Christian road into the future, resolved upon a life-long quest for further enlightenment and corresponding initiative.

If I were asked what, as a Unitarian Christian of the Twentieth Century, I conceived Christ to be, I should find the answer simple. I should reply that I thought that Jesus Christ had been loved and reverenced through the ages as the supreme revealer of the Divine. It was Jesus who revealed the innate likeness of human beings, and the brotherhood of man, with God the Father of all. It was Christ who revealed a fragment of the Divine in every man, outreaching church labels, yet permitting altars to rise in every life. It seems to me that this is the absolutely fundamental ground of a religious liberal, belief in the immanence of the Divine in human life and the sanctity of the altars men raise to their God. Show me the man, regardless of his own creed, who, seeing a fellow man fall upon his knees before his altar or bare his head passing by his sanctuary, say to himself, "God was remembered there. Would that He had also called to me!"—and I will call that man liberal.

A spurious liberalism would take offense at the form of the moment's worship, or enter a judgment against his brother as to sincerity. But Christian goodwill neither evades nor condemns diversity—it affirms an underlying unity. And if it took its inspiration from the lowly Jesus, and draws from the commanding Christ of history, the Christian has found a pattern and a compass to reckon by. Is it not essential for spiritual sanity and moral vigor to have a pattern and a common denominator?

MRS. HERBERT LYMAN
(Member of King's Chapel, Boston, Mass.)

One Star Shines

In little churches of the earth,
And in great cathedrals arched and dim,
We gather to commemorate a birth;
We see His star . . . and come to worship Him.
The centuries take toll of many things;
The false gods fall, their strange creeds prove untrue;
But steadfastly above us, one star shines,
The old, old story still is ever new.
Lord, in the wild disorder of our years,
When paths are tangled and the way leads far,
Although our eyes are blurred by many tears,
We still can see the glory of Thy star.
Should all else fail us, Lord, still let us see
The star ahead that leads at last to Thee.

GRACE CROWELL

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